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ABSTRACT

A study involving 231 principals, 155 school psychologists, 155 special education teachers, and 216 regular education teachers was conducted to investigate Ss' expectations regarding their own and others' roles in the team serving handicapped students. Members indicated whether or not each activity from a list of 25 was appropriate to their role and/or to each of the three other roles. Results indicated that there was intra- and interrole ambiguity about what activities were appropriate for each of the four target roles. Administrative implications of the findings, including role clarification and improved participation of multidisciplinary team members, were considered. (SBH)

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ROLE EXPECTATIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR MULTIDISCIPLINARY PUPIL PROGRAMMING

Kathleen S. Fenton, Roland K. Yoshida, James P. Maxwell
and Martin J. Kaufman

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Abstract

Legislation requiring the use of multidisciplinary teams to determine programs and placement for special education students has placed increased demands on a limited resource, school staff time. In order for planning and placement team members to use their time efficiently, they must have a clear idea of what is expected of them in their placement team roles. This study utilized a list of 25 activities which were rated by placement team members in four target roles (principal, school psychologist, special education teacher, and regular teacher). The members indicated whether or not each activity was appropriate to their role and/or to each of the three other roles. Results indicated that there was intra- and interrole ambiguity about what activities were appropriate for each of the four target roles. Administrative implications of the findings, including role clarification and improved participation of placement team members, are considered.

Public Law 94-142 requires that a committee composed of an administrator, a teacher, and if possible, a parent develop an individual educational plan (IEP) for each handicapped student. Furthermore, many states have legislation, regulations, or guidelines requiring that a multidisciplinary team including representatives of the administrative, pupil personnel, and instructional staffs determine programming and placement decisions for educationally handicapped students. Because school staff time is limited, these newly required placement teams must accomplish their goals efficiently as well as effectively.[1/] A team's efficiency depends in part on how smoothly its members interact. Team members' interactions are generally facilitated by clearly defined roles.

According to role theorists, each member's position carries with it a set of expectations held by other team members concerning the behavior of the person who occupies such a position (Bales & Slater, 1955; Sarbin & Allen, 1968). For example, a principal may be expected to act as the team's leader, whereas a school psychologist is expected to interpret the student's performance on diagnostic tests for the placement team. Role expectations are communicated formally and informally to members by the other members on the team. A member may be asked by a team leader to perform a particular function for a team or a team may influence a member's behavior by sending covert affective messages implying acceptance or rejection of a particular behavior.

Role ambiguity sometimes arises when there is insufficient consensus or information about the duties, authority, and responsibilities that are appropriate to a particular role. Two types of role ambiguity identified by Sarbin and Allen (1968) are (a) disagreement among members fulfilling a given

role and (b) disagreement between others' expectations for a given role and the expectations of the members fulfilling that role. Both types of role ambiguity have been reported as impeding group functioning with consequences ranging from dissatisfaction to apathy toward goal attainment, including psychological withdrawal, tension, and inability of the group to act as a unit (Bales, 1953; Bible & Brown, 1963; Gross, Mason, & McEachern, 1958; Hare, 1962; Kahn, 1964; Sarbin & Allen, 1968; Schein, 1965; Torrance, 1954). Thus, role ambiguity among PT members might serve to inhibit active participation on the part of some team members and might ultimately lead to a lack of commitment to implementing the team's decisions. Role ambiguity was also found to have a detrimental effect on a group's problem-solving behavior (Smith, 1957; Steiner & Dodge, 1956). In contrast, Smith (1957) found that clarification of roles resulted in increased group productivity and member satisfaction.

Because research studies have indicated that the accomplishments of a team can be affected by the members' perceptions of their roles, this study was undertaken --

1. to determine if members in each target role agreed about the expectations for their own role,
2. to determine if members in a target role have different expectations for their roles than do members in the other roles.

In the study, four staff roles were selected as target roles: principal, school psychologist, special education teacher, and regular education teacher. These four roles were selected because they are representative of the staff types required for a placement team by Connecticut state law. However, it should not be inferred that the many roles not included in this particular study are believed to be any less appropriate for placement teams than those which were selected.

METHOD

Subjects and Sampling Design

All public senior (n = 165) and junior (n = 136) high schools and a random sample of one third of the public elementary schools (n = 121) in Connecticut were invited to participate in the study. More than one half of the schools (53.6%, senior high; 57.0%, junior high; 52.9%, elementary) agreed to participate. From each school's list of handicapped students who began receiving special services during the first half of the 1975-76 school year, one student was randomly selected; 8% were educable mentally retarded; 55%, learning disabled; and 37%, socially and emotionally disturbed. The members of each student's placement team were identified and were mailed a questionnaire. Of these questionnaires, 1,478 or 96% were completed and returned by members of 230 placement teams.

This study examined responses from four subgroups of the final sample as follows:

Principals (n = 231) -- Principals, assistant principals, or other school building administrators, such as deans;

School psychologists (n = 155) -- State-credentialed school psychologists or psychometrists;

Special education teachers (n = 245) -- Teachers of the handicapped in a self-contained, resource, or itinerant capacity;

Regular education teachers (n = 216) -- Elementary or secondary teachers and department heads from grades K through 12.

Procedure

Twenty-five items were selected from a discussion of decision-making activities by Vroom (1969) and from a list of PT functions identified by Connecticut State Department of Education personnel and a sample of local district administrators and pupil personnel. The placement team members in the four selected roles indicated which activities from the list of 25 were perceived as appropriate for their own

role and which were perceived as appropriate for each of the three other roles. The same activity could be selected as appropriate for more than one role. Activities were grouped into five types as listed below. A sequence or order for the activities is not intended.

Activities

Diagnostic Activities

1. Gather information relevant to the case
2. Summarize information relevant to the case
3. Present information relevant to the case
4. Interpret information relevant to the case

Prescriptive Activities

5. Suggest student's subject matter needs
6. Suggest instructional methods for student
7. Set evaluation criteria for student's academic performance in the special education program

Evaluative Activities

8. Use student needs as guidelines for judging programming alternatives
9. Evaluate the alternatives from the viewpoint of the school's ability to deliver the services
10. Influence others to accept a specific program for the student
11. Set date for review of PPT decisions
12. Review the continued appropriateness of the student's educational program
13. Review the student's educational progress
14. Finalize decisions

Maintenance Activities

15. Keep the group on task
16. Encourage others to participate
17. Resolve conflicts of opinions
18. Critique members' actions

Administrative Activities

19. Determine team membership
20. Structure the meeting agenda
21. Delegate team tasks to members
22. Establish meeting dates
23. Assign responsiblity for implementation of the student's special education program
24. Disseminate the team decisions to appropriate personnel
25. Communicate team decisions to parents

A response was coded "1" when an activity was indicated as appropriate for a given role and "0" when indicated as inappropriate. For each of the four roles, the percentage of members in a given role and the percentage of the members in the other three roles who indicated that a given activity was appropriate to the role was calculated. Next, for each role, the mean percentage of the members in the target role and the mean percentage of the members in the other roles were calculated for each of the five types of activities. A mean percentage equal to or greater than 75% was coded C+ to indicate positive consensus (a majority of members agreed that the type of activity under consideration was appropriate for the target role); a mean percentage equal to or less than 25% was coded C- to indicate negative consensus (a majority agreed that the type of activity was inappropriate); and a mean percentage from 26% to 74% was coded A to indicate ambiguity (there was disagreement within a group about whether or not that type of activity was appropriate).

To see if members in the target role had the same expectations for their role as did the members in the other roles, a one-way (target vs. other) multivariate analysis of variance on the appropriateness of the 25 activities was performed. Since the MANOVA indicated that there were significant differences between the expectations of the members in the target role and those of the members in the other roles, univariate analyses of variance were performed for each activity to compare the within-role variance to the between-role variance. When there was a significant difference, Scheffe procedures were performed to identify which role means contributed to this difference.

The data were analyzed using the SAS Institute's general linear model procedure (Barr, Goodnight, Sall, & Helwig, 1976). An alpha level of .05 was adopted to test the significance of each statistical hypothesis.

RESULTS

Number of Activities Considered Appropriate for the Target Roles

Based on a criterion of 75% agreement, only principals indicated that more than half the activities were appropriate for their role. They selected 17 out of the 25 activities. Both school psychologists and special education teachers indicated that 9 activities were appropriate for their roles, and regular teachers indicated that only 2 out of the 25 activities were appropriate for their role. Moreover, the combined membership in the three other roles generally indicated that even fewer activities were appropriate for the target roles than did the members in the target roles. Members in the other roles felt that 13 activities were appropriate for principals, 4 for school psychologists, and 8 for special education teachers. Only for regular teachers did the members in other roles select a greater number of activities for the target roles than did the members in the target role themselves. They indicated that three activities were appropriate for regular teachers -- one more than the teachers had indicated.

Types of Activites Considered Appropriate

Table 1 presents the mean percentage of target role members and others who indicated that each type of activity was appropriate to the target role. It also indicates whether there was positive or negative consensus or ambiguity about the appropriateness of each activity type.

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In general, within-role consensus was low. Out of the 20 mean percentages (4 roles by 5 activity types), only 10 were indicative of within-role consensus. For school psychologists, there was within-role consensus about only one type

of activity -- more than 75% agreed that diagnostic activities were appropriate to their role; for regular teachers, there was consensus about only two of the five types of activities -- more than 75% agreed that they should not perform maintenance and administrative activities; for principals, there was positive consensus about three of the five types of activities -- evaluative, maintenance, and administrative ones and no negative consensus. Of the four roles, special education teachers had the most within-role agreement -- more than 75% agreed about four of the five activity types. They agreed that diagnostic and prescriptive activities were appropriate to their role and that maintenance and administrative activities were not.

An examination of the responses of the combined membership in the other roles revealed that members reached consensus about one type of activity being appropriate for school psychologists (diagnostic activities) and special education teachers (prescriptive activities) and that two activities were appropriate for principals (maintenance and administrative). No activities were seen as appropriate for the regular teachers by 75% of the members in the other roles. Furthermore, there was no consensus among others about any role participating in evaluative activities.

Expectation Differences between Target Role Members and Others

For role expectations held about a target role by its members versus the collective membership of the three other roles, the MANOVA was significant for each of the four target roles ($p < .001$). Table 2 shows the activities for which there were significant differences between the expectations of the members in the target role and the combined expectations of the members in the other roles. Agreement about which activities were either appropriate or not appropriate to the target role was highest for the regular teachers.

Their expectations differed from others' on only two evaluative activities. The school psychologists' expectations differed from others' on four activities, three of which were maintenance and one of which was an administrative activity. Special teachers' expectations also differed significantly from others' on four activities -- one prescriptive, one evaluative, and two administrative. Principals agreed with others about the appropriateness of 13 activities for their role but differed significantly about the appropriateness of 12. Difference between principals and others occurred in each of the five types of activities.

The post-hoc Scheffé procedures yielded no meaningful pattern of differences; that is, none of the three roles was consistently, significantly different than any of the others regarding expectations for a given target role.

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DISCUSSION

Intra- and interrole ambiguities were found in this study's sample of placement team members. These findings have administrative implications for a team approach to pupil programming related to role clarification, improved placement team member participation, and increased commitment to team decisions.

Limited Role Expectations

Placement team members are selected primarily on the basis of their school staff role as illustrated by Connecticut state law as well as Public Law 94-142, both of which require representatives of the administration, support services, and instructional staffs on every placement team. One assumes that these types of roles were designated because their occupants have a set of skills or expertise believed to be desirable in making programming and placement decisions. However,

the placement team members in this study had a restrictive view of the activities that were appropriate for their own roles as well as of the activities that were appropriate for the other three roles. Less than 75% of the regular teachers perceived their participation as appropriate for any of the five types of activities. Likewise, less than 75% of the members in the other roles indicated that regular teachers should participate in any of the five types of activities. Furthermore, principals, school psychologists, and special teachers each indicated that their own participation should be confined to a limited number of activities. These restricted views of their roles were also held by others. Both special teachers and school psychologists were allocated only one area of participation by a three-fourths majority of other members, and principals were allocated only two areas. Thus, the data suggest that expectations of placement team members are predicated on a hierarchical staffing structure of the school and/or district, and that these expectations may operate to restrict members' participation in some of the placement team activities. This restriction may be especially severe for those members who perceive themselves at the lower end of the status continuum.

The dynamics of role expectations are theorized by Sarbin and Allen (1968) to be similar to any social status; that is, a target role is defined by other complementary roles vis-a-vis its location in the social system and the rigidity of the system. One possible explanation of the findings in this study is that the expectations which members have for their own roles and for the roles of others reflect the relative influence, or lack thereof, of members' hierarchical position within the school organization. The regular teachers may perceive themselves and be perceived by others as having less status within the school hierarchy and therefore their potential participation in the placement team may be restricted accordingly.

Certainly these data raise doubts about the benefit of including personnel who neither perceive themselves nor are perceived by others as active placement team participants. For the placement team to benefit from a heterogeneous staff serving as team members, in-service training may be needed to allow the members in each role to explore ways in which teachers as well as members in other roles can contribute to the programming and placement process.

Members who describe limited or passive roles for themselves may become dissatisfied with the team process and with the decisions made by the team. Some support for this hypothesis is found in a study similar to the present one which examines the relationship between members' perceptions of participation in team activities and their satisfaction with the group process and decisions (Yoshida, Fenton, Maxwell, & Kaufman, in press). Regular teachers were found to participate less than other members and to be less satisfied with the process and the decisions of the group. This point deserves reiteration in light of the fact that teachers are frequently responsible for day-to-day implementation and evaluation of the placement team decisions. Their commitment is thus critical to the programming process, ultimately affecting the quality of the student's program.

Differences in Role Expectations

Significant differences were found between the expectations that members in the target roles had for their roles and those that the members of the three other roles had for the target roles. To the extent that different expectations are held, the placement team members may receive messages conflicting with their own perceptions. Spending time and effort on sorting the differences between one's own expectations and those of others may decrease the time available to spend on task activities. Thus, a placement team member's knowledge of others'

role expectations for him or her could facilitate group interaction regardless of whether his or her own conception of the role coincided with theirs.

When basic values and expectations are shared and supported by members of complementary roles their sense of commitment tends to increase. Conversely, to the extent that expectations are not shared or are undermined by antagonistic values, there will be correspondingly less commitment (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). Findings from Kahn's research indicate that conflicting role expectations have direct effects on the motivation of role members. Insufficient information and lack of agreement between members in a target role and members in other roles about the responsibilities of the target role were found to be significantly related to the target role member's tension, dissatisfaction, sense of futility, and lack of self-confidence.

In-service training could increase placement team members' awareness of the differences between their role expectations and the expectations that others have for their role and perhaps reduce the differences in some cases by providing an opportunity for members to assess their expectations, examine the origins of different expectations, and "role play" to explore the effects of these differences.

In conclusion, the results of this study indicated that differing role expectations exist among placement team members. These findings are interpreted to suggest the need for role clarification and consideration of role expansion through in-service training.

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FOOTNOTES

1/ For another study related to the accomplishment of team goals, see Fenton, Yoshida, Maxwell, and Kaufman. Recognition of responsibilities: an essential step to rational decision making. Unpublished report sponsored by the State Program Studies Branch, Division of Innovation and Development, Bureau of Education for the Handicapped, U.S. Office of Education, 1977.

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Table 1

Mean Percentage and Consensus of Target Role Members and Others Who Indicated that Each Type of Activity was Appropriate to the Target Role

Types of activities	Target role							
	Principal		School psychologist		Special teacher		Regular teacher	
	Target	Other	Target	Other	Target	Other	Target	Other
Diagnostic								
Mean	67	53	92	88	79	70	61	63
Consensus	A	A	C+	C+	C+	A	A	A
Prescriptive								
Mean	44	23	66	57	89	84	62	60
Consensus	A	C-	A	A	C+	C+	A	A
Evaluative								
Mean	81	70	67	57	67	57	46	46
Consensus	C+	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Maintenance								
Mean	92	83	53	34	19	21	13	15
Consensus	C+	C+	A	A	C-	C-	C-	C-
Administrative								
Mean	85	83	43	32	23	19	8	8
Consensus	C+	C+	A	A	C-	C-	C-	C-

Note. Assigned categories were determined as follows: C+ = Positive consensus: 75% or more of the members indicated the activity type was appropriate for the role. A = Ambiguity: more than 25%, but fewer than 75% of the members indicated the activity type was appropriate for the role. C- = Negative consensus: 25+% or fewer of the members indicated the activity was appropriate for the role.

Table 2

Activities for Which the Expectations of the Target Role Members and Those of the Other Role Members Differed Significantly

Principal	School psychologist	Special teacher	Regular teacher
Diagnostic activities			
. Summarize information . Present information . Interpret information	--	--	--
Prescriptive activities			
. Suggest needs . Use needs as guides . Suggest methods	--	. Use needs as guides	--
Evaluative activities			
. Set evaluation criteria . Review program . Review progress	--	. Review progress	. Finalize decisions . Set evaluation criteria
Maintenance activities			
. Influence others . Critique members' actions	. Keep team on task . Encourage others to participate . Resolve conflicts	--	--
Administrative activities			
. Assign responsibility	. Communicate with parents	. Communicate with parents . Assign responsibility	--